



## The Wisdom Psalms

### Introduction

The wisdom psalms have much in common with the books of Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. These books all give practical advice on how to live and find true happiness and God's blessing in this world. The wisdom psalms, like the wisdom books, draw sharp contrasts between the wicked and the righteous. They deal with man's proper relationship to God and stress the fear of the Lord. They also speak of human relationships, responsibilities, morality, reward, and punishment. They tell us how to live peaceably and constructively with our fellow man and in fellowship with God. They advise and admonish concerning our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. The wisdom psalms are wonderful treasures from God to keep us on the right track as we live our daily lives!

We studied five wisdom Psalms last week.

- I. The Doctrine of the Two Ways - Psalm 1
- II. Man's Wickedness and God's Perfection - Psalm 36
- III. Fretting and Trusting - Psalm 37
- IV. The Futility of Wealth - Psalm 49
- V. The Proper Perspective - Psalm 73

### I. Psalm 1 - The Doctrine of the Two Ways

Although this is one of the "orphan psalms," lacking the name of its writer, Psalm 1 is a magnificent double-doored entry into the Book of Psalms. It presents a picture of two kinds of people and two paths of life: the wicked (ungodly) person and his evil ways and the wise person and his righteous ways. The psalm opens by telling us that one of these is *blessed*, meaning supremely happy and living a fulfilled life. The Hebrew word is plural, which denotes that the blessings are extraordinary or multiplied.

The blessings belong to the righteous person! Dr. Tom Constable, in his "Notes on the Psalms" ([www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)) writes, "This blessedness is not deserved but is a gift from God. Even when the righteous do not feel happy they are blessed from God's perspective because He protects them from judgment."

#### A. The Righteous - Psalm 1:1-3

The Psalmist first describes what the righteous, or blessed, person does NOT do. He then goes on to reveal what he DOES do and what he is like.

1. The righteous does not fraternize with the ungodly - 1:1

The psalmist gives three expressions which describe those who are righteous: they do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the path of sinners, or sit in the seat of the scornful. These statements may be viewed in two ways. They may be an example of Hebrew parallelism (as described in Lesson 1), emphasizing the totality of the evil which the righteous shun. Or they may show a progression of evil which the righteous avoid, from casually walking with the ungodly, to stopping to fraternize with them, to sitting down and cooperating with them in the evil which they do. James Montgomery Boice (*Psalms*) supports the latter view, "The way of the wicked is downhill. Sinners always go from bad to worse." This view is definitely supported by Romans 1:18-32 which explains the total depravity of man and God's giving over the unrighteous to their own foolish ways as they spiral downward in their sin.

2. The righteous delights in and meditates on God's law - 1:2

The righteous person takes *delight* in God's word. Delighting in God's word goes beyond just reading it! It means continually reflecting upon God's word while going about your daily affairs, constantly considering if your thoughts, words, and actions are pleasing to God. It includes allowing God to work in your life, and willing and doing His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). Does this describe you?

3. The righteous prospers - 1:3

The psalmist gives us the image of a flourishing and fruitful tree planted beside a river which waters it. This tree is not only pleasing to in appearance but also provides shade and fruit. In the same way, the righteous person who is planted in God's word is not only blessed but also becomes a blessing to others.

#### B. The Ungodly - Psalm 1:4-5

*The ungodly are not so* (1:4). The contrast between the righteous and the ungodly is stark because, unlike the righteous, the ungodly have no regard for God and His word and thus have no relationship with Him.

1. The ungodly are like chaff - 1:4

Contrary to being flourishing and fruitful trees, the

ungodly are like *chaff*. Chaff is the worthless husk of grain allowed to blow away in the wind when wheat was winnowed at harvest time.

2. The ungodly will not stand in the judgment  
- 1:5

Just as winnowing separates the wheat from the chaff, so the righteous and the wicked will be separated at the judgment. See Matthew 3:12 and 13:30.

C. The two ways - Psalm 1:6

There are two ways to go: the way of the righteous and the way of the ungodly.

*The Lord knows the way of the righteous.* It is the way of the Lord Jesus Christ who is *the way, the truth, and the life* and the only way to God (John 14:6). See also Matthew 28:20.

*The way of the ungodly shall perish.* Proverbs 14:12 tells us *There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.* This is the way of the ungodly.

The choice is wisdom or wickedness, life and blessing or death. As we press past this double-door entry into the sanctuary of the Psalms, which way will you choose?

## II. Psalm 36 - Man's Wickedness and God's Perfection

Psalm 36 is a psalm of David which he introduces as an *oracle* (36:1). An *oracle* usually refers to a special revelation from the Lord. In this case, the *oracle* concerns *the transgression of the wicked*. Like Psalm 1, this psalm is also one of contrasts. While Psalm 1 contrasts the ways of the wicked and the righteous, Psalm 36 contrasts the transgression of the wicked and wonderful ways of the Lord.

A. The Perversity of the Wicked - Psalm 36:1-4

The way of the wicked is all downhill! It begins with a refusal to fear God. This is exactly the behavior of those described in Romans 1:18-22 who, although they knew God, refused to honor God. Instead, the wicked honor themselves (Psalm 36:2) and *Professing to be wise, they became fools* (Romans 1:22). When the wicked see their sin, they refuse to hate it. Instead, they foolishly pump up their own pride.

The prideful refusal to honor God results in wicked and deceitful words, loss of all wisdom, and a failure to do good (Psalm 36:3). The minds of the wicked become so evil that even when they are not doing evil, they are plotting it - even as they lie on their beds at night

(36:4)! The world of wickedness is an upside down world where good appears to be evil and evil seems good. Therefore, the wicked *do not abhor evil* (36:4). James Montgomery Boice ([Psalms](#)) labels this twisted thinking "spiritual insanity."

B. The Perfection of God - Psalm 36:5-12

Verses 5-9 express David's view of God, which is opposite that of the wicked. David reveres the Lord and glories in God's attributes and in God's goodness toward those who put their trust in Him. David closes his psalm humbly, asking God to continue His lovingkindness and righteousness.

1. God's attributes - 36:5-7a

David lists four attributes of God: lovingkindness, faithfulness, righteousness, and deep judgments. In the New King James Version, the first attribute is listed as *mercy* (36:5), but in the Hebrew, the same word is used in verse 7 where it is translated as *lovingkindness*. The Hebrew word is "hesed," which literally means "unfailing love." It incorporates the ideas of goodness, mercy, love, and grace and is used to describe God's covenant love for His people. His "hesed" is precious (36:7). It is a word we will see often in the Psalms.

The second attribute is faithfulness. Charles Hadden Spurgeon in his commentary, [Psalms](#), says this means "God "never fails, nor forgets, nor falters, nor forfeits his word." He can be completely trusted all the time, without limits.

Thirdly, God is righteous. He always does right. His ways are as firm and true as the highest mountain.

Finally, God's judgments are deep. This refers to His justice in dealing with all living things. We can be sure that the one who preserves both man and beast (36:6) will do what is right for us!

2. God's goodness toward those who trust Him - 36:7b-9

In contrast to the wicked who refuse to fear God, there are those who trustfully rest under the shadow of His wings. What a beautiful picture of humble and trusting security in His "hesed" care. We may come under the wings of His generous "hesed!"

The result of putting our trust in Him is fourfold: satisfaction, pleasures, life, and light. We are satisfied because all that is His, the fullness of His house (36:8), becomes ours. We find pleasure, or *delight* (NASB), in all that He gives. We find life in His fountain (36:9). Jesus put it this way when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well: *whoever drinks of the water that I*

*shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life* (John 4:14). Lastly, David says that in His light we see light (Psalm 36:9). He delivers us from the power of darkness (Colossians 1:13) and shines on us the *light of the gospel of the glory of Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:4). The blessings of those who trust starkly contrast with the resulting depravity of those who refuse (as seen in Psalm 36:1-1-4).

### 3. David's prayer for the future- 36:10-12

David prays that God will continue His lovingkindness and righteousness to those who are *upright in heart* (36:10), that is, those who honor and fear Him and put their trust in Him. He asks God to keep him from pride and from the evil philosophy of the wicked which totally disregards God (36:11). David knows the end of such ways: the wicked fall and *are not able to rise* (36:12).

Have you put your trust in God and His "hesed," or are you still grasping at worldly things in your search for happiness and fulfillment?

### III. Psalm 37 - Fretting and Trusting

Psalm 37 is an acrostic psalm. Every other verse begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This pattern of writing made for easier remembrance of the psalm's message.

This psalm has a practical message, one that is very applicable for Christians today. Almost everywhere you look, you can see evil prospering and the temptation is to fret about it. The psalmist says *do not fret* (37:1,7,8), but *trust in the Lord*. (37:3, 5).

#### A. Do Not Fret Because of Evildoers - Psalm 37:1-7a

Do not to be envious of those who do evil because they will soon be gone. (Psalms 36:12 and 37:2,35,36,38). Instead of fretting, David calls you to do four things. First, *trust in the Lord* (37:3). To trust in Him is to put your faith in Him. This will result in doing what is good instead of wasting your time fretting. Live with the Lord and *feed on His faithfulness* (37:3). Secondly, *delight yourself also in the Lord* (37:4). To do this, you must get to know Him well. The better you know Him, the more you will delight in Him and find that He gives you the desires of your heart. And what could you desire more than God, Himself? Thirdly, *commit your way to the Lord*, entrusting your life to Him (37:5). Lastly, David says *rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him* (37:7). Just be still before Him. There is no need for frantic activity or scrambling to keep up with the ways of the wicked. Simply "*rest in the Lord*" with a quiet spirit.

#### B. Do Not Fret When Evildoers Prosper - Psalm 37:7b-26

It does no good to become angry at God or at evil people when you see them doing wrong, even when it is against you. *It only causes harm* (37:8)!

##### 1. Those who wait on the Lord....shall inherit the earth - 37:9-11

When verse 9, *those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth* and verse 11, *is linked with verse 11, the meek shall inherit the earth*, we find that meekness is simply waiting on the Lord.

All things will be put right in God's perfect timing. *Evildoers will be cut off* (37:9), and *shall be no more* (37:10). The meek will *delight in the abundance of peace* (37:11) as they note that the wicked are gone. May the Lord haste the day!

##### 2. The Lord upholds the righteous - 37:12-26

*The wicked plots against the just* (37:12) but the Lord *laughs at him* (37:13). God's laughter is derisive (See Psalm 2:4) because He knows the futility of the plans of the wicked. God knows that *the wicked shall perish* (37:20). *The wicked borrows and does not repay* (37:21). They are greedy takers who think only of themselves and their worldly success, but their money will do them no good in the end because they are cursed by God and will be *cut off* (37:22).

In contrast, the righteous are merciful, giving, and blessed by God (37:21-22,26). Though the righteous person may have little in the way of material goods, he/she will have a priceless eternal inheritance (37:18) which is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading (1 Peter 1:4). The righteous may live contentedly on this earth knowing that their steps *are ordered by the Lord* and that God takes delight in their way of life (described in verses 3-7 and discussed in section A above).

#### C. Depart From Evil and Do Good - Psalm 37:27-40

David, the psalmist, encourages us to consider the long run, knowing that the wicked will not last, but that the righteous, with God as their strength, help, and deliverer, will be saved! This salvation comes through abiding in the Lord ( *dwell forevermore* - 37:27). God does not forsake His own. He preserves them forever (37:28). Even when the wicked plot against God's people, God will not leave them or condemn them. God *loves justice* (37:28) and justice will be done. Therefore, in meekness *wait on the Lord* (37:34). Those who patiently wait on the Lord will be exalted by Him

to receive a precious inheritance. They will see the wicked pass away and be no more.

Observe those who are blameless and upright (37:37). Know that their future is peace but the future of the wicked is destruction. As you put your trust in God, you will find Him to be your strength in time of trouble, your helper, your deliverer, and your salvation (37:39-40)

#### IV. Psalm 49 - The Futility of Wealth

This psalm was written by the sons of Korah, Levites who ministered to God, perhaps as choral singers. Psalm 49 identifies itself as a wisdom psalm in verse 3, *my mouth shall speak wisdom*. That wisdom concerns the futility of wealth. It may buy many things, but it cannot buy one extra moment of life. There is no amount of money that can be paid to God to ransom a person from death (49:7). Far better than possessing wealth is to have understanding of such things (49:20).

##### A. A Call to All Peoples - Psalm 49:1-4

The psalmist calls people around the world to listen to his words of wisdom. He shares wisdom to impart *understanding* (49:3) of God's loving intentions for His people. He will listen to what God has to say (*I will incline my ear to a proverb* - 49:4) and he will disclose it in the form of a song (*on the harp* - 49:4).

##### B. A Costly Redemption - Psalm 49:5-15

James Montgomery Boice ([Psalms](#)) writes, "The foolishness of trusting wealth comes from the obvious truth that it cannot save a person from death (vv 5-9). It is wisdom to remember this, and the height of folly to forget it. Since we are eternal creatures, we ought to focus on how to prepare for eternity rather than how we can accumulate increasing wealth here and perish with it" The psalmist contrasts between those who trust in riches and those who trust in God.

##### 1. Those who trust in riches - 49:5-15

No matter how much money they have, those who trust in riches cannot redeem even one soul (49:7). God alone can redeem, as we will see in verse 15. *For the redemption of their souls is costly* (49:8). The apostle Peter speaks of this in 1 Peter 1:18-19, *you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold,..... but with the precious blood of Christ*.

Those who trust in riches perish, leaving their wealth to others. They build monuments and name lands and buildings after themselves, but they do not consider their own mortality (49:10-12).

Only fools trust in riches. They and those who admire them (49:13) are like sheep destined for slaughter

(49:14). Death is their shepherd: a stark contrast to the godly psalmist of Psalm 23 whose Shepherd is the Lord.

##### 2. Those who trust in God - 49:5-15

Those who trust in wealth are losers. Only those who trust in God will be redeemed. The psalmist says with confidence, *But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave* (49:15). It is clear that what the psalmist values most is life with God, for his next words are *He shall receive me*. He looks forward to *the morning* (49:14), an allusion to the resurrection, and life beyond death with his Redeemer.

##### C. A Sobering Conclusion - 49:16-20

The psalmist gives encouragement not to feel inferior or envious of the wealthy. Those who pridefully congratulate themselves on the glory of their wealth cannot take it with them when they die (49:17). They lack understanding (49:20) and *shall never see the light* (49:19)! Murdoch Campbell comments, "We leave the world either with God or with nothing" ([From Grace to Glory: Meditations on the Psalms](#)).

#### V. Psalm 73 - The Proper Perspective

Psalm 73 was written by Asaph, a musician from the priestly tribe of Levi during the reign of King David. At the opening of the psalm, we find Asaph fretting because he envies the prosperity of the wicked. Asaph saw many ungodly people enjoying numerous physical blessings. He struggled with this while comparing his own life and his commitment to God. Asaph's struggles provide spiritual and practical insight for godly people, especially in the materialistic society in which we live today. Psalm 73 gives us a view of Asaph's world from two very different perspectives.

##### A. The Sinful Viewpoint — Psalm 73:1-6

The Psalm begins with a statement of God's goodness to His people, Israel, particularly those whose hearts are pure. The psalm shows that purity of heart is essential to having the proper perspective yet Asaph's heart was diverted from the proper perspective for a time.

##### 1. Asaph's confession - 73:1-12

Asaph confesses that he had almost stumbled. Notice the parallelism in verse 2 which emphasizes his point, *my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped*. This is because Asaph envied the prosperity of the wicked. Their lives seemed so much more carefree (73:4-5), they were proud and violent (73:6), they were self-indulgent (73:7), they scoffed at oppression (73:8-9), they had many followers (73:10), they lived

as if God had no knowledge of the wrongs they were doing (73:11), and they were always at ease and getting richer (73:12).

## 2. Asaph's commitment - 73:13-16

In light of all that he saw, Asaph began to question his commitment to God. It seemed to him that following God led only to continual problems. He was plagued and punished all day long (73:14). However, Asaph is glad that he had not spoken of his doubts to others, for then he would have *been untrue to the generation of Your children* (73:15). So Asaph tried to make sense of the dilemma which he saw. He tried to understand, but it was just too painful for him.

### B. The View from the Sanctuary - Psalm 73:17-28

To gain understanding, Asaph had to change his point of view.

## 1. Understanding - 73:17-20

It was not until Asaph went into the Sanctuary of God that he understood. There in God's house, he wisely remembered that even though the wicked prosper now, their final destiny is judgment and punishment: in the end they will reap destruction, desolation, doom, and eternal rejection by God (73:19-20). The wicked seem to be secure, but in reality they are on slippery ground (73:18).

## 2. Repenting - 73:21-26

Seeing things from God's point of view, led Asaph to repent. He confessed his foolishness and ignorance (73:22) and humbled himself before God. This renewed his awareness of God's blessings. Verses 25 and 26 are a poignant expression of faith and contentment in God.

*Whom have I in heaven but You?*

*And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.*

*My flesh and my heart fail;*

*But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

## 3. Committing - 73:28

Asaph concludes by renewing his commitment to God. *But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works.*

### **Applications**

1. In today's materialistic and self-centered society, it is easy for Christians (and even entire church congregations) to be drawn into thinking and acting the wicked way of the world. How has studying the wisdom psalms helped you see things from God's perspective? Can you honestly and wholeheartedly proclaim Asaph's words of commitment for yourself?

2. After studying five wisdom psalms, have you made the decision to choose the way of wisdom and reject the way of wickedness? Why? What changes are you making in your life in order to do so?

